

7-20-24 Message to Roeh Israel Abilene
Torah Portion: Numbers 22:2 – 25:9 *Balak* (“destroyer”)
Haftarah: Mic 5:6 – 6:8
Suggested Acheron K’tuvim: Matt 5:13-16

Under the Law – Part 11 – Don’t Mix Evil with Holiness

Central question of this message: Are you living a sanctified life so your spiritual armor is powered-up?

We are in parasha *Balak*. *Balak* means “destroyer”. It takes its name from the second word of the first sentence of the parasha in both the English and the Hebrew of this parasha.

Num 22:2-5

2 Now Balak the son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites. 3 So Moab was in great fear because of the people, for they were numerous; and Moab was in dread of the sons of Israel. 4 And Moab said to the elders of Midian, "Now this horde will lick up all that is around us, as the ox licks up the grass of the field." And Balak the son of Zippor was king of Moab at that time.

² וַיֵּרָא בָלָק בֶּן־צִפּוֹר אֶת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה יִשְׂרָאֵל
 And saw Balak the son of Zippor all that had done Israel
 7200 1111 1121 6834 853 3605 834 6213 3478

לְאֹמְרִי:
 to the Amorites.
 567

³ וַיִּגֹּר מוֹאָב מִפְּנֵי הָעָם מְאֹד כִּי רַב־הוּא
 And was afraid Moab of the people, sore because were many: they
 1481 4124 6440 5971 3966 3588 9999 7227 1931

וַיִּקְזַן מוֹאָב מִפְּנֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:
 and was distressed Moab because of the children of Israel.
 6973 4124 6440 1121 3478

⁴ וַיֹּאמֶר מוֹאָב אֶל־זִקְנֵי מִדְיָן עַתָּה יִלְחֲכּוּ הַקָּהָל אֶת־
 And said Moab unto the elders of Midian, Now shall lick up this company
 559 4124 413 2205 4080 6258 3897 6951 853

כָּל־סָבִיבֵינוּ כְּלַחֵד הַשּׁוֹר אֶת יֵרֶק הַשָּׂדֶה
 all that are round about us, as licketh up the ox the grass of the field.
 3605 9999 5439 3897 7794 853 3418 7704

וּבָלָק בֶּן־צִפּוֹר מֶלֶךְ לְמוֹאָב בָּעֵת הַהִוא:
 And Balak the son of Zippor king of the Moabites at time. that
 1111 1121 6834 9999 4428 4124 6256 1931

We know the story. Balak, king of Moab, is afraid of Israel, because he has seen what happened to the Amorites. So he bands together with Moab's traditional enemy, Midian, to come against Israel, which is poised to enter the Promised Land.

Balak hires a famous sorcerer, a practitioner of black magic, Bilaam, to come from his land between the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers,

to curse Israel. Bilaam comes to do that. But he has a dream. In that dream he hears from G-d that he is not to curse Israel.

Yet, Bilaam gets up in the morning and is on his way to cooperate with the cursing of Israel, and the Angel of the L-rd (the *Malak Adonai*) stands in the way, but only the donkey can see Him.

He strikes the donkey and then has a conversation with the donkey about what all this stopping is about.

Three times Balak takes Bilaam to high places, and even makes sacrifices to pagan gods to help get that cursing started. Three times Bilaam doesn't curse, but rather blesses Israel.

And we know that part of one of those blessings has become the first part of our liturgy as we enter the synagogue. It is the *ma tovu* prayer.

Num 24:5

5 How fair are your tents, O Jacob, Your dwellings, O Israel!

Sorcery, spells, and curses seemed to be rather common in that part of the world at that time. And Scripture is clear that G-d's people are to not engage in such things.

Deut 18:9-13

9 "When you enter the land which the Lord your God gives you, you shall not learn to imitate the detestable things of those nations. 10 **There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, one who uses divination, one who practices witchcraft, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, 11 or one who casts a spell, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. 12 For whoever does these things is detestable to the Lord;** and because of these detestable things the Lord your God will drive them out before you. 13 You shall be blameless before the Lord your God.

These things are not merely bad ideas. G-d says they are "detestable".

Our sages have suggested that there was a canopy of armor around and over Israel in the desert. This existed because of their national devotion to G-d, and His commandments.

Bilaam soon found out that such was the case. His curses came out as blessings, and I have no doubt but that this was against his will. I believe he wished to speak the curses, but his mouth spoke blessings. This is no greater miracle than a donkey speaking, is it?

So, since the initial cursing of Israel didn't work, Bilaam had a "plan B". He counseled Balak to send Midianite women into the camp of Israel, and by doing that seduce the men not only to sexual sin, but also to influence them to worship Baal of Peor, the pagan god.

Why did Bilaam come up with such a plan? He operated in the spiritual realm – the *black* spiritual realm where Satan rules. He was told by the demons he communed with how to defeat Israel in a spiritual battle.

That technique they told him to use is to weaken the integrity of that spiritual armor.

The shield of protection around Israel was “powered” by Israel’s holiness, and honor to G-d. Thus Satan can cut the “power” to that armor by diminishing Israel’s holiness, and having our people dishonor G-d. As our people fell for the temptation, their spiritual armor fell away.

Although the event of Bilaam’s counsel to Balak regarding the “plan B” is not specifically found in the chronology of Scripture, it is referenced as having occurred, and so we know it happened.

We find that reference recorded along with the death of Bilaam himself in the war with Midian, as recorded in parasha *Matot*.

Num 31:6-18

6 And Moses sent them, a thousand from each tribe, to the war, and Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest, to the war with them, and the holy vessels and the trumpets for the alarm in his hand. 7 So they made war against Midian, just as the Lord had commanded Moses, and they killed every male. 8 And they killed the kings of Midian along with the rest of their slain: Evi and Rekem and Zur and Hur and Reba, the five kings of Midian; **they**

also killed Balaam the son of Beor with the sword. 9 And the sons of Israel captured the women of Midian and their little ones; and all their cattle and all their flocks and all their goods, they plundered. 10 Then they burned all their cities where they lived and all their camps with fire. 11 And they took all the spoil and all the prey, both of man and of beast. 12 **And they brought the captives and the prey and the spoil to Moses, and to Eleazar the priest and to the congregation of the sons of Israel, to the camp at the plains of Moab,** which are by the Jordan opposite Jericho. 13 And Moses and Eleazar the priest and all the leaders of the congregation went out to meet them outside the camp. 14 And Moses was angry with the officers of the army, the captains of thousands and the captains of hundreds, who had come from service in the war. 15 **And Moses said to them, "Have you spared all the women? 16 "Behold, these caused the sons of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to trespass against the Lord in the matter of Peor, so the plague was among the congregation of the Lord. 17** Now therefore, kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman who has known man intimately.

This leads me to one of the most troubling issues that I see facing the body of faith today – the same issue that faced Israel in our parasha today – that of mixing evil into holiness.

The covering favor of G-d did not merely exist for those in the wanderings before entering the Land, it continues to exist for those who belong to G-d and are faithful to keep His ways.

But what I see in the body of faith in this time of history is that we are even now being seduced by the worldly things around us. And we have begun mixing evil into a life of holiness.

Yeshua warned against this mixing, and describes it as completely destroying the value of the holiness.

Matt 5:13-16

13 "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless,¹ how will it be made salty again? It is good for nothing anymore, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men. 14 "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 "Nor

¹ Salt becomes “tasteless” when it is polluted with dirt. The “dirt” in our “salt” is our sin.

do men light a lamp, and put it under the peck-measure, but on the lampstand; and it gives light to all who are in the house. 16 "Let your light shine before men in such a way² that they may see your good works³, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

The pollution of holiness among the body of faith didn't delay long in infiltrating the normative church.

The Italian historian Gavassi reminds us, "A pagan flood flowing into the church, carried with it its customs, practices and idols" (Gavazzi's Lectures, Page 290).

Did the leadership of the normative church purge those things? Sadly, not as much as they should have. Pagan customs polluted the new congregations forming after the resurrection, and those customs and practices have become somewhat entrenched. Worse than that, they have become a bit normalized and even valued.

² The way our light should shine before men is in purity, not polluted with sin.

³ The phrase "good works" is a Hebrew idiom which means to live-out G-d's commandments in a way which is pure and right.

It is easy to pick-out some glaring examples of how the larger body of faith in the normative Christian church has still been mixing evil with holiness. The list is easy to make.

- Abandoning the Sabbath for Sunday
- Abandoning Passover and First Fruits for Easter
- Celebrating Halloween
- Worshipping Mary
- Dividing the Scriptures into “Old” and “New”
- Abandoning kosher for convenience and license
- Proclaiming that G-d’s holy standards are done away with
- Installing prohibited images and idols in churches
- Failing to condemn (and even endorsing) movies and books glorifying sorcery and witchcraft.

What is not so easy is to examine our own lives to see where there is a bit of dirt that is polluting our salt and light.

Some of us wait until after Rosh Hashanah to begin the process of sweeping out the corners of our lives. We must not do so. Our Sages have said, “repent one day before you die.” And the obvious implication is that since you don’t know the date of your death, repent daily.

What happens when the people of faith fail to purge out the evil in our lives? The protection of G-d which covers us with His protection is either diminished or removed entirely.

Ps 34:10-21

10 The young lions do lack and suffer hunger; But they who seek the Lord shall not be in want of any good thing.

11 Come, you children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord.

12 Who is the man who desires life, And loves length of days that he may see good?

13 Keep your tongue from evil, And your lips from speaking deceit.

14 Depart from evil, and do good; Seek peace, and pursue it.

15 The eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous, And His ears are open to their cry.

16 The face of the Lord is against evildoers, To cut off the memory of them from the earth.

17 The righteous cry and the Lord hears, And delivers them out of all their troubles.

18 The Lord is near to the brokenhearted, And saves those who are crushed in spirit.

19 Many are the afflictions of the righteous; But the Lord delivers him out of them all.

20 He keeps all his bones; Not one of them is broken.

21 Evil shall slay the wicked; And those who hate the righteous will be condemned.

Scripture provides the pathway to victory for us.

James 4:7-10

7 Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. 8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9 Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.

In our portion for today, our people were under an attack. It was spiritual, and also physical. The physical attack could not prevail when we kept our spiritual armor intact by walking in holiness with our G-d. But know that Satan will try a different way to get you to defeat yourself, just like he did with Bilaam.

If you sin and pollute your salt with dirt and your light with darkness, Satan knows that your connection with G-d will be weakened, if not blocked altogether. When that connection is broken, then the conduit for blessing is blocked, and your soul is at risk.

But if during that attack you fight back, seeing that Satan is bringing temptation on you so you will dishonor G-d, knowing that he is using his “plan B”, then you will simply become stronger.

James 1:2-4

2 Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. 4 And let endurance have its perfect

result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

And because you will grow in spiritual strength by this work, that is precisely why Satan will flee. He doesn't want you strong, so he will leave you alone.

And maybe the most important point of all this is this. The spiritual armor around you will not necessarily protect your physical body. But it will, if you maintain its power, protect your soul.

The days ahead are growing very dark, indeed, but if we stay faithful to our G-d in holiness and honor to Him, our souls will be safe in His hands.

Rev 2:12-17

12 "And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write:

The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this:

13 'I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is;
and you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith,
even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful

one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. 14
'But I have a few things against you, because you have
there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept
teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons
of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit
acts of immorality. 15 'Thus you also have some who in
the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. 16
'Repent therefore; or else I am coming to you quickly,
and I will make war against them with the sword of My
mouth. 17 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the
Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, to
him I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will
give him a white stone, and a new name written on the
stone which no one knows but he who receives it.'

I pray that all of you will be spared from the worst of the coming
holocaust, but I also know that some in the Body will be brutally
killed or wounded in the coming spiritual battle.

So, my fellow soldiers, keep your spiritual armor powered-up,
knowing that in this battle we may well suffer wounds, but G-d
holds your soul in the palm of His hand, and no one can snatch that
away.

Persevere unto the end. Fight alongside me, my friends. I read the Book. I have seen that the end of this battle will be, glorious.